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New analytical monographs on TCM herbal drugs for quality proof

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New Analytical Monographs on TCM Herbal Drugs for Quality Proof

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Keywords

TCM herbal drug · Monograph · Quality proof · Analytical methods

Summary

Regardless of specific national drug regulations there is an international consensus that all TCM drugs must meet stipulated high quality standards focusing on authentication, identification and chemical composition. In addition, safety of all TCM drugs prescribed by physicians has to be guaranteed. During the 25 years history of the TCM hospital Bad Kötzing, 171 TCM drugs underwent an analytical quality proof including thin layer as well as high pressure liquid chromatography. As from now mass spectroscopy will also be available as analytical tool. The findings are compiled and already published in three volumes of analytical monographs. One more volume will be published shortly, and a fifth volume is in preparation. The main issues of the analytical procedure in TCM drugs like authenticity, botanical nomenclature, variability of plant species and parts as well as processing are pointed out and possible ways to overcome them are sketched.

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Schlüsselwörter

TCM-Arzneimittel · Monografie · Qualitätskontrolle · Analytische Methodik

Zusammenfassung

Ungeachtet spezifischer nationaler Arzneimittelregulierungen gibt es einen internationalen Konsens darüber, dass sämtliche TCM-Präparate verbindlichen qualitative hochstehenden Standards entsprechen müssen, die an der Echtheitsprüfung, Identifizierung und chemischen Komposition orientiert sind. Zudem muss die Sicherheit der von Ärzten verschriebenen TCM-Arzneien gewährleistet sein. In der nunmehr 25-jährigen Geschichte der TCM-Klinik Bad Kötzing wurden 171 TCM-Präparate einer analytischen Qualitätsprüfung unterzogen, unter anderem mittels einer Dünnschichtchromatografie sowie einer Hochdruckflüssigkeitschromatografie. Zudem wird jüngst die Spektroskopie als analytisches Instrument eingesetzt. Die Ergebnisse dieser Testverfahren sind bereits zusammengefasst und in drei entsprechenden Bänden publiziert; weitere Publikationen sind derzeit in Vorbereitung. Hier werden die wichtigsten Herausforderungen der Analyse wie Echtheitsprüfung, botanische Nomenklatur, Variabilität der Pflanzenspezies und -teile sowie Aufbereitung hervorgehoben und potenzielle Lösungsmöglichkeiten skizziert.

Legislation

When we started this work 25 years ago, we noticed that the methods stipulated in the former Chinese Pharmacopoeias were not sufficient to meet the high standards of the official German and

European drug regulatory authorities. Among the various prerequisites for a perfect quality proof of these herbal drugs, authentication and safety proof took precedence. Identification was at first primarily synonymous with the macroscopic and microscopic botanical authenticity. Since that time, however, chemical composi-

tion and particularly the complex entities of the low molecular constituents have become of greater interest for oral medicinal application and thus in evaluating the pharmacological effects and therapeutic efficacy of the plant drug extracts obtained by decoction or other extraction processes.

Independent of the specific national drug regulations for countries around the world, there is also an international consensus that all TCM drugs must meet certain stipulated high quality standards. Additionally, it must be guaranteed that all TCM drugs prescribed by physicians are safe for patients. The safety proof aims mainly to exclude any kind of possible falsifications of the herbal drugs and to ensure a limited concentration of heavy metals, aflatoxins and defined microbial adulterations.

Applied Methods in Quality Proof

The main method used is the TLC (thin layer chromatography), which allows us to visualise the main characteristic constituents as coloured TLC photographs. The second, globally used method is HPLC (high-pressure liquid chromatography) in the form of a so-called fingerprint analysis. This technique allows us to detect the complex entities of all low-molecular constituents of a plant drug extract, with the advantage that the single constituents can be made visible in the form of peak profiles. Additionally, the single constituents can be quantified by using online-recordable UV spectra with the diode array. It is also possible to gain preliminary information as to which chemical structure type the single compounds may belong. From that year on, LC-MS (liquid chromatography-mass spectrometry) is also available for the analysis of plant extracts whose chemical compositions have previously been investigated only minimally.

Analytical Monographs of Investigated Herbal Chinese Drugs

The following volumes were / are going to be published by Springer, with financial support from the TCM hospital Bad Kötzing [1–3]:

- Vol. I and II (2011) containing 80 analytical monographs
- Vol. III (2015) containing 23 analytical monographs
- Vol. IV (2016) containing 22 analytical monographs (publication scheduled for July 2016)
- Volume V is currently in preparation; the publication is scheduled for February/March 2017.

A list of all completed analytical monographs of TCM drugs is presented in table 1 and table 2. (All single analytical monographs published can be purchased at www.springer.com/de/book/9783709107621). One example for an investigated herbal Chinese drug is *Artemisia annua* L. which recently gained attention in reference to the Nobel Prize in Medicine in 2015 awarded to the Chinese Professor Dr. Tu Youyou, Beijing (fig. 1) who isolated artemisinin as the main constituent of this plant. Today, artemisinin is



Fig. 1. Tu Youyou.

applied in combination with various chemosynthetic drugs (e.g., mefloquin) in the treatment of malaria.

Prospects for Improvement of Quality Proof of Chinese Herbal Drugs

Authenticity of TCM Drugs Not Definitely Assessed

Some herbal drugs originated from wild collections are not yet cultivated under controlled conditions. If they are derived from cultivations it must be taken into account that they may originate from quite different climate zones and are harvested under different conditions. Therefore, their chemical authenticity and homogeneity within a defined plant species often cannot be guaranteed. We have thus investigated as many herbal drug samples as we were able to acquire from different districts, climate zones and markets in China, as well as reference drugs from some German herbal drug firms that also import herbal drugs from China.

Lacking Information on Plant Parts

In 5–10% of imported plant drugs from China, we do not receive any specific information about the plant part (flos, fructus, semen, folium, cortex or radix and rhizoma) from which they were derived. Such drugs are specified as ‘herba’ analogues in the Chinese Pharmacopoeia. For these drug samples, it cannot be expected that the TLC and HPLC chemical fingerprints are homogenous. Not all parts of a herbal drug contain the same chemical constituents. The documentation in the corresponding herbal analytical monographs confirms this assessment (e.g. Herba Leonuri, vol. II; Herba Lysimachiae, vol. III or Herba Violae, vol. IV). Therefore, it will be necessary to correct this discrepancy in one of the following Chinese Pharmacopoeia publications. Otherwise, it is unlikely to reproduce the results of clinical application.

Uncertain Botanical Nomenclature

The non-uniform nomenclature for the same plant from various regions of China can cause impermissible confusions or falsifications. This occurred some years ago when the root of *Stephania*

Table 1. Contents, alphabetically (Latin nomenclature)

Monograph	Volume	Monograph	Volume	Monograph	Volume
Acanthopanax senticosi, Radix	I	Cyper, Rhizoma	III	Persicae, Semen	V*
Achyranthis, Radix	III	Desmodii styracifolii, Herba	III	Peucedani, Radix	III
Aconiti kusnezofii, Radix	II	Dictamni, Cortex	V*	Phellodendri amurensis, Cortex	II
Aconiti lateralis, Radix	II	Dioscoreae hypoglaucae, Rhizoma	II	Phellodendri chinensis, Cortex	II
Acori calami, Rhizoma	II	Dioscoreae nipponicae, Rhizoma	II	Picrorrhizae, Rhizoma	V*
Acori tatarinowii, Rhizoma	II	Dioscoreae oppositae, Rhizoma	II	Pinelliae, Rhizoma	I
Albiziae, Cortex	IV	Dioscoreae septemlobae, Rhizoma	II	Piperis longi, Fructus	II
Alismatis, Rhizoma	II	Dipsaci, Radix	II	Plantaginis, Herba	IV
Allii Tuberosi, Semen	V*	Drynariae, Rhizoma	I	Plantaginis, Semen	IV
Alpiniae Katsumadai, Semen	V*	Ecliptae, Herba	I	Platycodonis, Radix	III
Amomi rotundus, Fructus	I	Ephedrae, Herba	IV	Polygalae, Radix	V*
Ampelopsis, Radix	V*	Epimedii, Herba	II	Polygoni avicularis, Herba	V*
Andrographis, Herba	I	Equiseti hiemalis, Herba	V*	Polygoni cuspidate, Rhizoma et Radix	V*
Anemarrhenae, Rhizoma	I	Eriocauli, Flos	III	Polygoni multiflori, Radix	I
Angelicae dahuricae, Radix	I	Eucommiae, Cortex	II	Poria	II
Angelicae pubescentis, Radix	I	Evodiae, Fructus	I	Prunellae, Spica	IV
Angelicae sinensis, Radix	I	Forsythiae, Fructus	I	Psoraleae, Fructus	IV
Apocyni veneti, Folium	III	Fraxini, Cortex	IV	Puerariae, Radix	I
Arctii, Fructus	IV	Fritillariae, Bulbus	I	Quinquefolii, Radix	II
Arecae, Pericarpium	V*	Ganoderma	II	Rehmanniae, Radix	I
Armeniaca, Semen	V*	Gardeniae, Fructus	I	Rhei, Radix et Rhizoma	II
Arnebiae, Radix	V*	Gastrodiae, Rhizoma	I	Rosae laevigatae, Fructus	V*
Artemisiae annuae, Herba	IV	Gentianae macrophyllae, Radix	IV	Salviae miltiorrhizae, Radix et Rhizoma	II
Artemisiae argyi, Folium	IV	Ginkgo, Folium	V*	Sanguisorbae, Radix	V*
Artemisiae scoparia, Herba	II	Ginseng, Radix et Rhizoma	II	Saposhnikoviae, Radix	III
Asari, Herba	I	Glehniae, Radix	V*	Sappan, Lignum	IV
Astragali, Radix	I	Glycyrrhizae, Radix et Rhizoma	III	Sarcandrae, Herba	III
Attractylodes macrocephalae, Rhizoma	I	Gynostemmatis, Herba	III	Schisandrae, Fructus	I
Atractylodis lanceae, Radix	II	Houttuyniae cordatae, Herba	I	Schizonepetae, Spica	V*
Aucklandiae, Radix	III	Isatidis, Radix	II	Scrophulariae, Radix	I
Aurantii immaturus, Fructus	V*	Kochiae, Fructus	IV	Scutellariae barbatae, Herba	V*
Aurantii, Fructus	V*	Leonuri, Herba	II	Scutellariae, Radix	II
Bambusae, Caulis	III	Ligustici chuanxiong, Radix	I	Sesami nigrum, Semen	IV
Belamcandae sinensis, Rhizoma	I	Ligustri lucidi, Fructus	III	Siegesbeckiae, Herba	II
Bupleuri, Radix	I	Linderae, Radix	V*	Sinapis albae, Semen	IV
Camelliae, Folium	II	Lonicerae japonicae, Caulis	II	Sinomenii, Caulis	I
Carthami, Flos	II	Lonicerae japonicae, Flos	II	Siraitiae (Momordicae), Fructus	III
Cassiae, Semen	II	Luffae, Fructus	III	Solidaginis, Herba	V*
Celosiae, Semen	IV	Lycii radices, Cortex	II	Sophorae flavescentis, Radix	II
Chaenomelis, Fructus	II	Lycii, Fructus	II	Sophorae immaturus, Flos	I
Chrysanthemi, Flos	V*	Lycopi lucidi, Herba	I	Spatholobi, Caulis	III
Cimicifugae, Rhizoma	II	Lycopodii, Herba	III	Stephaniae tetrandrae, Radix	I
Cinnamomi, Cortex	II	Lysimachiae christinae, Herba	III	Trachelospermi, Caulis et Folium	V*
Citri reticulatae viride, Pericarpium	II	Magnoliae officinalis, Cortex	I	Tribuli, Fructus	II
Citri reticulatae, Pericarpium	II	Magnoliae, Flos	II	Trichosanthis, Fructus	IV
Clematidis, Radix	I	Mori radices, Cortex	II	Trichosanthis, Radix	IV
Cnidii, Fructus	II	Mori, Folium	II	Trigonellae, Semen	V*
Codonopsis pilosulae, Rhizoma	I	Mori, Ramulus	IV	Uncariae cum Uncis, Ramulus	I
Coptidis, Rhizoma	I	Morindae officinalis, Radix	III	Vaccariae, Semen	IV
Corni, Fructus	IV	Moutan, Cortex	III	Verbenae, Herba	V*
Corydalis, Rhizoma	II	Myrrha	V*	Violae, Herba	IV
Crataegi, Fructus et Folium	III	Notoginseng, Radix et Rhizoma	II	Vitidis, Fructus	IV
Curcumae longae, Radix	II	Notopterygii, Rhizoma seu Radix	I	Xanthii, Fructus	IV
Curcumae, Radix	II	Oldenlandiae, Herba	III	Zanthoxyli, Pericarpium	I
Curcumae, Rhizoma	II	Olibanum	V*	Zingiberis, Rhizoma	V*
Cuscutae, Semen	V*	Ophiopogonis, Radix	II	Ziziphi spinosae, Semen	I
		Paeoniae albae/rubrae, Radix	I		

*Currently in process.

Table 2. Contents, alphabetically (Chinese names)

Chinese name	Volume	Chinese name	Volume	Chinese name	Volume
Aiye	IV	Heshouwu	I	Sangbaipi	II
Bai hua she she cao	III	Honghua	II	Sangye	II
Bailian	V*	Houpo	I	Sangzhi	IV
Baishao	I	Huaihua	I	Sanqi	II
Baixianpi	V*	Huaimi	I	Shanyao	II
Baizhi	I	Huajiao	I	Shanyinhua	II
Baizhu	I	Huangbo	II	Shanzhay	III
Bajitian	III	Huanglian	I	Shanzhay	III
Banlangen	II	Huangqi	I	Shanzhuyu	IV
Banxia	I	Huangqin	II	Sharen	I
Banzhilian	V*	Huhuanglian	V*	Shechuangzi	II
Beimu	I	Huluba	V*	Shegan	I
Beishashen	V*	Huzhang	V*	Shengma	II
Bianxu	V*	Jianguang	II	Shenjincao	III
Bibo	II	Jiaogulan	III	Sichangpu	II
Buguzhi	IV	Jiegeng	III	Sigualuo	III
Cang'erzi	IV	Jiezi	IV	Suanzaoren	I
Cangzhu	II	Jili	II	Sumu	IV
Caodoukou	V*	Jingjiesui	V*	Taoren	V*
Chaihu	I	Jinqiancao	III	Tianhuafen	IV
Cha-yeh	II	Jinyingzi	V*	Tianma	I
Chenpi	II	Jinyinhua	II	Tusizi	V*
Cheqiancao	IV	Jiucazi	V*	Wangbuliuxing	IV
Cheqianzi	IV	Jixueteng	III	Weilingxian	I
Chishao	I	Juemingzi	II	Wuweizi	I
Chuanshanlong	II	Juhua	V*	Wuyao	V*
Chuanxinlian	I	Kushen	II	Wuzhuyu	I
Chuanxiong	I	Kuxingren	V*	Xiakucao	IV
Ciwujia	I	Lianqiao	I	Xiangfu	III
Dafupi	V*	Lingzhi	II	Xinyi	II
Dahuang	II	Luobumaya	III	Xixiancao	II
Danggui	I	Luohanguo	III	Xixin	I
Dangshen	I	Luoshiteng	V*	Xiyangshen	II
Danshen	II	Mabiancao	V*	Xuanshen	I
Difuzi	IV	Mahuang	IV	Xuduan	II
Digupi	II	Maidong	II	Yanhusuo	II
Dihuang	I	Manjingzi	IV	Yimucao	II
Diyu	V*	Mianbixie	II	Yinchen	II
Duhuo	I	Mohanlian	I	Yinxingye	V*
Duzhong	II	Moyao	V*	Yinyanghuo	II
Ezhu	II	Mudanpi	III	Yizhihuanghua	V*
Fangfeng	III	Mugua	II	Yuanzhi	V*
Fangji	I	Muxiang	III	Yujin	II
Fenbixie	II	Muzei	V*	Yuxingxao	I
Fuling	II	Niubangzi	IV	Zangchangpu	II
Fuzi	II	Niuxi	III	Zelan	I
Gancao	III	Nüzhenzi	III	Zexie	II
Ganjiang	V*	Qianghuo	I	Zhicaowu	II
Gegen	I	Qianhu	III	Zhimu	I
Gouqizi	II	Qingfengteng	I	Zhiqiao	V*
Gouteng	I	Qinghao	IV	Zhishi	V*
Gualou	IV	Qingpi	II	Zhizi	I
Guangjinqiancao	III	Qingxiangzi	IV	Zhongjiefeng	III
Guanhuangbo	II	Qinjiao	IV	Zhuru	III
Gujincao	III	Qinpi	IV	Zicao	V*
Gusuibu	I	Rendongteng	II	Zihuadiding	IV
Hehuanpi	IV	Renshen	II		
Heizhima	IV	Rougui	II		
		Ruxiang	V*		

*Currently in process.

tetrandra (Hanfangji) was mistaken for the root of *Aristolochia fangji* (Guanfangji). The latter contains the carcinogenic aristolochic acid which can produce severe nephrotoxic side effects. A similar Chinese drug is the tetraploid *Acorus tatarinowii* with a high content of carcinogenic β -asarone in contrast to the diploid *Acorus calamus* L., known officially in most Western countries. This must also be corrected in one of the next Chinese Pharmacopoeias. Meanwhile, special chromatographic methods were developed and described in the analytical monographs to avoid such falsifications.

Great Variability of Plant Species

Several herbal drug monographs of the Chinese Pharmacopoeia list more than 2 species or subspecies, and sometimes up to 8 species labelled as synonyms, subspecies or subvarieties. It is assumed that all species contain the same constituents in the same amount. In 20 years of TLC and HPLC fingerprint investigations, we have shown that in many cases considerable differences were detectable between the single species and the main official drugs. Correspondingly, it may be suggested that a great number of the 'subspecies' do not possess the same pharmacological and therapeutic efficacy. This fact must be taken into consideration.

Processing of TCM Drugs

Apart from simply cutting and cleaning of the raw drugs, the Chinese Pharmacopoeia describes many other types of pretreatment or processing that is not considered in Western pharmacopoeias. In the Pharmacopoeia of the People's Republic of China, the processing is defined as 'a unique pharmaceutical technology that processes crude drugs according to their individual nature, and the requirements of drug dispensing, pharmaceutical preparation, and clinical use, following the Traditional Chinese Medicine theory'. However, in none of the monographs the necessity of spe-

cific processing is substantiated. According to the Chinese Pharmacopoeia, processing can be achieved primarily through the following methods: roasting and broiling, scalding, calcining, carbonising, steaming, boiling, stewing with wine, vinegar or salt water and different kinds of stir baking. In one example, the alkaloid-containing herbal drugs of *Aconitum* spp., *Aconitum carmichaelii* and *Aconitum kusnezoffii*, are treated with salt water, liquorice root, black beans and water after scalding by heating at high temperature with sand. The TLC and HPLC fingerprint analysis shows that in the processed roots, the alkaloids aconitine and mesaconitine are significantly degraded. Here, the necessity to reduce the aconitine content is clear because of its toxicity in higher doses (i.e. in an unprocessed form). Therefore, in Western countries such as Germany, aconitine preparations are acceptable only in homeopathic dilution form (e.g., as aconitum D6 or D12). This means that it is mandatory to limit the proportion of aconitine to a stipulated level.

As far as the processing methods of the Chinese Pharmacopoeia are concerned, they must be replaced by the modern phytochemical methods demanded by the German and by most European drug regulation authorities.

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Disclosure Statement

H.W. is chief of the drug control centre for TCM drugs, located at the University of Munich and member of the hospital's scientific advisory board. R.B. is member and D.M. is chair of this board.

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